Tho: Lone

AN ESSAY UPON POETRY.

OF Things in which Mankind does most excell,
Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well;
And of all sorts of Writing none there are
That can the least with Poetry compare;
No kind of work requires so nice a touch,
And if well done, there's nothing shines so much:
But Heav'n forbid we should bestow that name
To grace the vulgar with that sacred name;

'Tis

'Tis not a Flash of Fancy which sometimes
Dasling our Minds, sets off the slightest Rimes;
Bright as a blaze, but in a moment done;
True Wit is everlasting, like the Sun;
Which though sometimes beneath a cloud retir'd,
Breaks out again, and is by all admir'd.
Number, and Rime, and that harmonious sound,
Which never does the Ear with harshness wound,
Are necessary, yet but vulgar Arts,
For all in vain these superficial parts
Contribute to the structure of the whole
Without a Genius too, for that's the Soul;
A Spirit which inspires the work throughout,
As that of Nature moves this World about;
A heat that glows in every word that's writ,
That's something of Divine, and more than Wit;
It self unseen, yet all things by it shown,
Describing all men, but describ'd by none;
Where

Where doſt thou dwell? what caverns of the Brain
Can ſuch a vaſt and mighty thing contain?
When I at idle hours in vain thy abſence mourn,
O where doſt thou retire? and why doſt thou return,
Sometimes with powerful charms to hurry me away
From pleaſures of the night, and buſineſs of the day?
Ev'n now too far tranſported I am fain
To check thy courſe, and uſe the needfull rein;
As all is dullneſs, when the Fancy's bad,
So without Judgment, Fancy is but mad;
And Judgment has a boundleſs influence,
Not upon words alone, or only ſenſe,
But on the world, of manners, and of men,
Fancy is but the Feather of the Pen;
Reaſon is that ſubſtantial uſeful part,
Which gains the Head, while t'other wins the Heart.

Here

Here I should all the differing kinds rehersе
Of *Poetry* with various sorts of Verse;
But who that task can after *Horace* do?
That mighty Master and Example too?
Ecchoes at best; all we can say is vain,
Dull the design, and fruitless were the pain;
'Tis true, the Ancients we may rob with ease,
But who with that sad shift himself can please,
Without an Actor's pride? a Players Art
Is more than his who writes the borrow'd part.
Yet modern Laws are made for later Faults,
And new Absurdities inspire new thoughts;
What need has *Satyr* then to live on theft,
When so much fresh occasion still is left?
Folly abounds, nay flourishes at Court,
Where on its sphere it finds a kind support;
But hold, *White-Hall* has nothing now to fear,
'Tis Wit and Sence that is the Subject here.

Defects

Defects of witty Men deserve a Cure,
And those who are so, will the worst endure.

First then of *Songs*, that now so much abound,
Without his Song no Fop is to be found,
A most offensive Weapon which he draws,
On all he meets, against *Apollo's* Laws:
Though nothing seems more easy, yet no part
Of Poetry requires a nicer Art;
For as in rows of richest Pearl there lyes
Many a blemish that escapes our Eyes,
The least of which Defects is plainly shewn
In some small Ring, and brings the value down;
So Songs should be to just perfection wrought,
Yet where can we see one without a fault;
Exact propriety of words and thought?
Th' expression easy, and the fancy high,
Yet that not seem to creep, nor this to fly;

No words transpos'd, but in such just cadance,
As, though hard wrought, may seem the effect of chance;
Here, as in all things else, is most unfit
Bawdry barefac'd, that poor pretence to Wit;
Such nauseous Songs as the late Convert made,
Which justly call this censure on his Shade;
Not that warm thoughts of the transporting joy,
Can shock the Chastest, or the Nicest cloy;
But obscene words, too gross to move desire,
Like heaps of Fuel do but choak the Fire.
That Author's Name has undeserved praise,
Who pall'd the appetite he meant to raise.

Next, *Elegie*, of sweet but solemn voice,
And of a Subject grave, enacts the choice,
The Praise of Beauty, Valour, Wit contains,
And there too oft despairing Love complains.

In vain alas, for who by Wit is moved?
That Phœnix she deserves to be beloved.
But Noisy Nonsence, and such Fops as vex
Mankind, take most with that fantastick Sex.
This to the praise of those who better know,
The many raise the value of the few.
But here, as I too oft alas have tryed,
Women have drawn my wandring thoughts aside.
Their greatest fault, who in this kind have writ,
Is neither want of words, nor dearth of wit;
But though this Muse harmonious numbers yield,
And every Couplet be with fancy fill'd;
If yet a just coherence be not made
Between each thought, and the whole model layed
So right, that every step may higher rise,
As in a Ladder, till it reach the Skies;
Trifles like these perhaps of late have past,
And may be lik'd awhile, but never last.

'Tis Epigram, 'tis Point, 'tis what you will,
But not an Elegie, nor writ with skill,
No * *Panegyrick*, nor a *Coopers-Hill*.

* *Wallers*

A higher flight and of a happier force
Are *Odes*, the Muſes moſt unruly Horſe;
That bounds ſo fierce, the Rider has no reſt,
But foams at mouth, and ſpeaks like one poſſeſt.
The Poet here muſt be indeed Inſpired,
And not with fancy, but with fury fired.
Cowley might boaſt to have perform'd this part,
Had he with Nature joyn'd the rules of Art:
But ill expreſſion gives too great Allay
To that rich Fancy, which can ne're decay.
Though all appears in heat and fury done,
The Language ſtill muſt ſoft and eaſy run.
Theſe Laws may ſeem a little too ſevere,
But Judgment yields, and Fancy governs there;

Which

Which, though extravagant, this Muſe allows,
And makes the work much eaſier than it ſhews.

Of all the ways that Wiſeſt Men could find
To mend the Age, and mortify Mankind,
Satyr well writ has moſt ſucceſsful prov'd,
And cures, becauſe the remedy is lov'd.
'Tis hard to write on ſuch a Subject more,
Without repeating things ſaid oft before.
Some vulgar Errors only Lets remove
That ſtain this Beauty, which we chiefly love.
Of well-choſe words ſome take not care enough,
And think they may be as the Subject rough.
This great work muſt be more exactly made,
And ſharpeſt thoughts in ſmootheſt words convey'd:
Some think if ſharp enough, they cannot fail,
As if their only buſineſs was to rail;

But 'tis mens *Foibles* nicely to unfold,
Which makes a Satyr differ from a Scold.
Rage you muſt hide, and prejudice lay down,
A Satyr's Smile is ſharper than his Frown.
So while you ſeem to ſcorn ſome Rival Youth,
Malice it ſelf may paſs ſometimes for Truth.
The Laureat here may juſtly claim our praiſe,
Crown'd by *Mac-Fleckno* with immortal Bays;
Though prais'd and puniſh'd for another's Rimes,
His own deſerve that glorious fate ſometimes;
Were he not forc'd to carry now dead weight,
Rid by ſome Lumpiſh Miniſter of State.

Here reſt my Muſe, ſuſpend thy cares awhile,
A greater Enterprize attends thy toil;
And as ſome Eagle that intends to fly
A long and tedious Journy through the Sky,

Conſiders firſt the perils of her caſe,
Over what Lands and Seas ſhe is to paſs;
Doubts her own ſtrength ſo far, and juſtly fears
That lofty Road of Airy Travellers;
But yet incited by ſome great deſign,
That does her hopes beyond her fears incline,
Prunes every feather, views her ſelf with care,
Then on a ſudden flounces in the Air.
Away ſhe flies ſo ſtrong, ſo high, ſo faſt,
She leſſens to us, and is loſt at laſt.
So greater things my Muſe prepares to ſing,
Things that will Malice, and may Envy bring;
Yet why ſhould Truth offend, when only told
T' inform the Ignorant, and warn the Bold?
On then my Muſe, adventrouſly engage,
To give Inſtructions that concern the Stage.

The *Unites* of Action, Time, and Place,
Which, if observed, give Plays so great a grace,
Are, though but little practis'd, too well known
To be taught here, where we pretend alone
From nicer faults to purge the present Age,
Less obvious Errors of the *English* Stage.

First then, *Solliopies* had need be few,
Extreamly short, and spoke in passion too.
Our Lovers talking to themselves, for want
Of others, make the Pit their Confidant;
Nor is the matter mended much, if thus
They trust a friend only to tell it us.
Th' occasion should as naturally fall,
As when *Bellario* confesses all.

Figures of *Speech*, which Poets think so fine,
Art's needless Varnish to make Nature shine,

Are all but Paint upon a beauteous Face,
And in Descriptions only claim a place.
But to make Rage declame, and Grief discourse,
From Lovers in despair fine things to force,
Must needs succeed, for who can chuse but pity
To see poor Hero's miserably witty?
But O the Dialogues, where jest and mock
Is held up like a rest at Shittle-cock!
Or else like Bells eternally they Chime,
Men dye in Simile, and live in Rime.
What things are these, who would be Poets thought,
By Nature not inspir'd, nor Learning taught?
Some Wit they have, and therefore may deserve
A better way than this by which they starve:
But to write Plays! why 'tis a bold pretence,
To Language, Breeding, Essay and good Sense:
Nay more, for they must look within to find
Those secret turns of Nature in the mind.

Without this part in vain would be the whole,
And but a Body all without a Soul:
All this together yet is but a part
Of Dialogue, that great and powerful Art,
Now almoſt loſt, which the old *Grecians* knew,
From whence the *Romans* fainter Copies drew,
Scarce comprehended ſince but by a few.
Plato and *Lucian* are the beſt Remains
Of all the wonders which this art contains;
Yet to our ſelves we Juſtice muſt allow,
Shakeſpear and *Fletcher* are the wonders now:
Conſider them, and read them o're and o're,
Go ſee them play'd, then read them as before.
For though in many things they groſly fail,
Over our Paſſions ſtill they ſo prevail,
That our own grief by theirs is rockt aſleep,
The dull are forc'd to feel, the wiſe to weep.

There

Their Beauties Imitate, avoid their faults;
First on a Plot employ thy carefull thoughts,
Turn it with time a thousand several waies,
This oft alone has given success to Plays;
Reject that vulgar error which appears
So fair, of making perfect characters,
There's no such thing in Nature, and you'l draw
A faultless Monster which the world ne're saw.
Some faults must be, that his misfortunes drew,
But such as may deserve compassion too.
Besides the main Design composed with Art,
Each moving Scene must be a Plot a part,
Contrive each little turn, mark every place,
As Painters first chalk out the future face,
Yet be not fondly your own slave for this,
But change hereafter what appears amiss.
Think not so much where shining thoughts to place,
As what a man would say in such a case.

Neither in Comedy will this ſuffice,
The Actor too muſt be before your eyes,
And though 'tis Drudgery to ſtoop ſo low,
To him you muſt your utmoſt meaning ſhow.
Expoſe no ſingle Fop, but lay the load
More equally, and ſpread the Folly broad;
The other way's too common, oft we ſee
A fool derided by as bad as he;
Hawks fly at nobler game, but in his way,
A very *Owl* may prove a Bird of prey;
Some *Poets* ſo will one poor Fop devour;
But to Collect, like Bees from every flower,
Ingredients to compoſe that precious juice,
Which ſerves the world for pleaſure and for uſe,
In ſpite of faction this will favour get,
But *Falſtaff* ſeems unimitable yet.
Another fault which often does befall,
Is when the wit of ſome great *Poet* ſhall
So overflow, that is, be none at all, That

That all his Fools ſpeak ſence, as if poſſeſt,
And each by Inſpiration breaks his jeſt;
If once the Juſtneſs of each part be loſt,
Well we may laugh, but at the *Poets* coſt:
That ſilly thing men call ſheer Wit avoid,
With which our Age ſo nauſeouſly is cloy'd,
Humour is all, and 'tis the top of wit,
T' expreſs agreeably a thing that's fit.
But ſince the *Poets* we of late have known,
Shine in no dreſs ſo well as in their own,
The better by example to convince,
Lets caſt a view on this wrong ſide of ſence.

Firſt a Solloquie is calmly made,
Where every reaſon is moſt nicely weigh'd,
At the end of which moſt opportunely comes
Some Hero frighted at the noiſe of Drums

For her dear ſake, whom at firſt ſight he loves;
And all in Metaphor his paſſion proves;
But ſome ſad accident, that's yet unknown,
Parting this pair, to leave the man alone;
He's Jealous preſently, we know not why,
Then, to oblige his Rival needs muſt dy;
But firſt he makes a Speech, wherein he tells
The abſent Nymph how much his flame excells,
And yet bequeaths her generouſly now
To that dear Rival whom he does not know,
Who coming in, ſent ſure by Fate's command,
Too late alas withholds his haſty hand,
Which now has given that moſt lamented ſtroke,
At which this very Stranger's heart is broke;
Who more to his new friend than Miſtreſs kind,
Mourns the ſad Fate of being left behind,
Moſt naturally prefers thoſe dying Charms
To Love, and living in his Ladyes Arms.

How shamefull, and what monstrous things are these?
And then they rail at th' Age they cannot please,
Conclude us only partial for the dead,
And grudge the Sign of old *Ben. Johnson's* head.
When the Intrinsick value of the Stage
Can scarce be judg'd, but by the following Age;
For Dances, Flutes, *Italian* Songs, and rime
May keep up sinking Nonsence for a time,
But that will fail, which now so much o're rules,
And sence no longer will submit to fools.

By painfull steps we are at last got up
Pernassus hill, upon whose Airy top
The *Epick* Poets so divinely show,
And with just pride behold the rest below.
Heroick Poems have a just pretence
To be the chief effort of humane sence,

work of ſuch ineſtimable worth.
There are but two the world has yet brougth forth,
Homer and *Virgil*: with what awfull ſound
Each of thoſe names the trembling Air does wound?
Juſt as a Changeling ſeems below the reſt
Of men, or rather is a two legg'd beaſt,
So thoſe Gigantick ſouls amaz'd we find
As much above the reſt of humane kind.
Nature's whole ſtrength united; endleſs fame,
And univerſal ſhouts attend their name.
Read *Homer* once, and you can read no more,
For all things elſe will ſeem ſo dull and poor,
You'l wiſh't unread; but oft upon him look,
And you will hardly need another book;
Had *Boſſu* never writ, the world had ſtill
Like *Indians* view'd this wondrous piece of Skill,
As ſomething of Divine the work admired,
Hoped not to be Inſtructed, but Inſpired;

Till he diſcloſing ſacred Myſteries,
Has ſhewn where all the mighty Magick lyes,
Deſcrib'd the Seeds, and in what order ſown,
That have to ſuch a vaſt proportion grown.
Sure from ſome Angel he the ſecret knew,
Who through this Labyrinth has given the clue.
But what alas avails it poor Mankind
To ſee this promiſed Land, yet ſtay behind?
The way is ſhewn, but who has ſtrength to go?
Who can all Sciences exactly know?
Whoſe fancy flyes beyond weak reaſon's ſight,
And yet has Judgment to direct it right?
Whoſe nice diſtinction, *Virgil*-like, is ſuch,
Never to ſay too little nor too much?
Let ſuch a man begin without delay,
But he muſt do much more than I can ſay,
Muſt above *Cowley*, nay and *Milton* too prevail,
Succeed where great *Torquato*, and our greater *Spencer* fail.

F I N I S.